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AUTHOR Haas, Linda
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ABSTRACT

A role-sharing marriage is one in which the husband and wife share equally the rights and responsibilities traditionally assigned to one or the other sex as part of their ideal family role, in the areas of breadwinning, decisionmaking, and domestic chores. A marriage style based on sexual equality is rarely found in practice and subsequently has been mostly unstudied by sociologists. Benefits and problems in such marriages were examined among 31 couples involved in successful role-sharing relationships. Data collection techniques included several face-to-face interviews with husbands and wives, time-budgets, personality inventories, and attitudinal questionnaires. Results indicate that role-sharing enhances self-actualization and better family relations, at least for certain couples. At the same time, there exist considerable social barriers to the widespread abandonment of traditional family roles. For instance, vestiges of sex-role socialization make it difficult for couples to equitably share responsibility for all domestic chores, inflexible work hours make sharing childcare difficult, and traditional attitudes about children's needs stand in the way of fathers participating more in childrearing. These barriers can be expected to disintegrate with time. (Author/JLL)

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BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS OF EGALITARIAN MARRIAGE:

A STUDY OF ROLE-SHARING COUPLES

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by

Linda Haas

Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a considerable amount of progress has been made in the United States toward the goal of improved opportunities for women in the world outside the home. This trend has been especially noticeable in the area of paid employment, where in the past 25 years the number of women who have entered the labor force has doubled and their proportion of the work force has risen from 25% to 40% (U.S. Department of Labor 1975:9). Instead of being full-time housewives, the majority of women aged 20 to 64 (58%) are now in the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor 1978:22).

Progress toward an elimination of traditional sex-roles has been much slower in the family, where men and women still are expected to engage in drastically different pursuits. Women's primary concern is supposed to be caring for their husbands and children and managing the household, with their own personal needs being subordinate to the needs of their families. Even when they engage in outside employment, women are still held responsible for housework and childcare, which results in their assuming the burden of a double workload. Women rarely enjoy the same amount of status or influence within the family as their husbands, though they are somewhat more likely to receive deference and a greater share in decision-making if they work (Safilios-Rothschild 1972, Bernard 1973, Bernard 1974, Scanzoni 1970, Blood & Wolfe 1960, Nye 1976, Pleck 1977).

Although society's view of women's role has been somewhat redefined to include outside employment, role expectations for men have changed hardly at all. Despite the fact that more wives work than ever before, men are still held ultimately responsible for providing for the financial needs of the family. Several time-budget studies have shown that husbands of working women do not put in appreciably more hours at housework and childcare than do husbands of

housewives. Those chores men do perform are traditionally masculine ones, such as repairs and yardwork (Grønseth 1975b, Walker 1970, Vanek 1974, Pleck 1977, Nye 1976).

The lack of equality in the family perpetuates inequality in the labor market. Since women's primary concern is supposed to be their families, they are not obligated to prepare themselves for well-paying occupations, to develop a commitment to an occupation, to look and work for promotions, to participate in the labor force on a full-time, life-long, uninterrupted basis. Women also hesitate to try for high prestige occupations with good incomes because traditional family norms dictate that the husband should earn more money than his wife and that the husband's job should take priority over the wife's. The range of jobs available to women is much narrower than that available to men, and women are less likely to hold positions of authority, even in fields where they predominate. Women are more likely than men to hold part-time jobs, and more likely to experience unemployment. Most importantly, women's wages are far below those of men, with the average full-time female employee earning only 58% of the average male's pay. This situation is a result of the expectations of employers, the type of encouragement females get from parents and teachers, and women's own internalization of the demands of the traditional feminine role (Pleck 1977, Weitz 1977).

While men reap some benefits from their advantaged position in the labor market, their job experiences are not exactly enviable. As providers for their families, men feel forced to be content with unpleasant jobs - dirty, noisy factory or construction work or professional work which requires much concentration, overtime, and travel. Men feel like they can't risk criticizing arrangements at work because they might be fired; they hesitate to quit a boring job to try their hand at an occupation more personally satisfying because of the loss of income to their families. Men do not have the option to participate

in the labor force that most married women still hold (at least in theory), and they can't divorce themselves psychologically from their jobs as easily as can women whose primary identification is with their family rather than their work role. Achievement, defined generally as economic success and measured specifically by the size of one's paycheck, becomes the primary goal of a man whose relation to his family is defined mainly in economic terms. Emotional relationships and other life goals are by necessity given a lower priority in men's lives, which can cut down on their self-fulfillment (Brenton 1976, Williams 1976, Gould 1976).

It is not surprising that sexual equality within the family has been so slow in coming about in the United States. Throughout human history and in almost every known society, some sort of division of labor between the sexes has apparently existed and the weight of tradition leaves its mark on contemporary social arrangements. Research studies show that, while there is some popular support for equalizing men's and women's family responsibilities, Americans are much less likely to advocate changes in the family than they are to support an improvement in women's position in the labor market or in politics (Harris 1972, Mason & Bumpass 1975, Roper & Labeff 1977). Even in communist countries where official support of sexual equality has improved women's situation considerably, family roles have remained basically the same, with the women being overburdened with work and family obligations (Rowbotham 1974, Scott 1974, Haas 1978).

Nonetheless, contemporary industrial societies are characterized by certain social developments which increase the chances that couples today will find the old segregated model of marriage unworkable and turn to a new egalitarian pattern.

In the first place, real or presumed biological differences between the

sexes are no longer as important as determinants of the family division of labor as they used to be; when biological justifications for the different roles of the sexes are removed, people can feel freer to question those roles. In the past, women's capacity to bear and nurse children and their presumed nurturant and emotional nature, in the face of men's greater physical abilities and aggressiveness, seemed to dictate a family pattern whereby wives were primarily concerned with childcare and home management while husbands competed in the occupational world, brought home the bacon, and assumed authority over family members. Nowadays, the influence of biological sex differences on family patterns is receding mainly because of the greater use of birth control devices, increased mechanization in the workplace, and the declining use of force in marital relationships. Moreover, scientific research is beginning to show and people are starting to believe that many of the biology-related differences once thought to characterize the sexes are either mythical or created primarily by the different types of upbringing the sexes receive.

Another aspect of society which probably causes more and more people to fit less well into traditional family roles is the tendency for women to enter the labor force in growing numbers. This may give women a taste for the privileges attached to the traditionally male breadwinner role, accustom them to economic independence, cause them to resent being fully responsible for housework and childcare, and increase their decision-making influence by giving them greater self-confidence and financial resources. The husband may grow to appreciate a wife who has interests outside the home because it gives them more things in common and new things to talk about, because the wife is less dependent on the husband and need not use him as a vicarious outlet for her ambitions, and because he enjoys the luxuries that two incomes allow them to afford.

Nowadays, people don't or can't rely so much on relatives outside the family to assist them when one or the other spouse is unable for some reason to perform their usual family duties. This makes it increasingly difficult for a family to cope with an unemployed husband or an incapacitated wife. It is becoming practical for a husband and wife to be able to assume the duties of the other spouse when the need arises, and this ability is best fostered under a relationship where the husband and wife have similar responsibilities in the first place.

Other promising changes are occurring. New laws and liberal court decisions are slowly equalizing women and men's legal status in the family. People are generally becoming more favorable toward equality in the family, especially as they become less influenced by traditional religious ideology, more likely to believe that learning is responsible for observed sex differences, and more affected by feminist ideology (Parelius 1975, Tavris 1973, Bayer 1975, Tavris & Jayartna 1972, Roper & Labeff 1977, Keith & Brubaker 1977, Tomeh 1978). A greater number of wives will be in a position to push for a change toward the sharing of traditional roles as their educational level increases and their self-confidence grows, and as the spread of the "intimacy model" of marriage makes their husbands more willing to pay attention to their feelings. Finally, a growing number of couples are freed to try a non-traditional lifestyle as they attend college, become residentially mobile, and otherwise become detached from traditional ideas and milieux (Grønseth 1975a, Scanzoni & Scanzoni 1976, Mason & Bumpass 1975).

In this paper, I will report on results of a study I carried out on some American couples who are trying to break with tradition and institute sexual equality within their own marriages - that is, to mutually share the rights and responsibilities now generally assigned to one or the other sex as part of

their prescribed family role. This means, first of all, that the wife is expected to share equally in the responsibility for economic support of the family, something which has traditionally been regarded as only the husband's duty. Secondly, both the husband and wife are responsible for performing domestic chores to an equal extent, including (1) traditionally feminine tasks such as housework, childcare, and keeping up kinship obligations and (2) traditionally masculine tasks such as yardwork and repairs. Lastly, both spouses have equal influence on the making of major (traditionally male-dominated) and minor (traditionally female-dominated) decisions. Such a mutual sharing of rights and responsibilities by husband and wife has been given several labels by researchers of the family: the egalitarian family, the symmetrical family, jointness of conjugal roles, the equal-partner arrangement, as well as role-sharing (the term used here) (Garland 1972, Young & Willmont 1973, Bott 1971, Scanzoni & Scanzoni 1976, Bernard 1973, Nye 1976).

The role-sharing lifestyle is distinguishable from the traditional family pattern because of its emphasis on equality; i.e., husbands and wivers perform similar tasks, assume the same family responsibilities, and share the same privileges and status. This is not to be confused with the increasingly common dual-career or two-earner family patterns, because in these lifestyles, the wife's working is still subordinated to the husband's, her employment is still optional or undesirable, and the husband at most only "helps out" with domestic chores (Holmstrom 1972, Poloma & Garland 1971, Rapoport & Rapoport 1971, Scanzoni & Scanzoni 1976, Pleck 1977).

A marriage style based on sexual equality is rarely found in practice and subsequently has been mostly unstudied by sociologists. This study was an exploratory one, devoted to a close examination of thirty-one couples who had tried role-sharing and apparently were successful at it. The study was designed to yield hypotheses concerning:

(1) the nature of role-sharing marriages in practice

(2) the conditions under which couples choose and adopt role-sharing

(3) the structural pressures and social forces which threaten to subvert relationships of sexual equality in the family

(4) the costs and benefits role-sharing has for family members

This particular paper will report on results for topics (3) and (4) above, emphasizing the benefits and problems associated with an egalitarian marriage pattern. Information on the other subjects can be found in the original report of the study (Haas 1977)

STUDY DESIGN

Selection and Nature of the Sample

Since past studies of the family imply that couples who role-share make up only a very tiny proportion of the general population, a random sampling design could not be employed in this study without a great amount of expense and time being spent locating "needles in the haystack." Therefore, a type of selective sampling technique was employed in the liberal university community of Madison, Wisconsin to identify possible participants for the study. One hundred fifty-four couples were located who had been referred by others or by themselves as sharing fairly evenly the responsibilities of breadwinning, housekeeping, childcare, and decisionmaking within their marriages or cohabiting arrangements. Their names were obtained from contacts in various Madison organizations and institutions (e.g., a daycare center, the local chapter of the National Organization for Women, a liberal religious group, university organizations) and from announcements published in various newsletters and newspapers.

Each of these couples was contacted by telephone during January, 1976. They were asked several questions designed to measure in a very rough fashion whether or not their relationship was characterized by role-sharing to the extent that they or those who nominated them had indicated. These questions were:*

*Role-sharing responses are given in parentheses.

(1) What is your occupation? [employed, student, looking for work]

(2) How many hours do you work per week? [roughly same amount as spouse]

(3) What is [your spouse's] occupation? [employed, student, looking for work]

(4) How many hours per week does s/he work? [roughly same amount as spouse]

(5) What per cent of childcare do you think you're responsible for, compared to your spouse? [40%-60%]

(6) What per cent of all the housework that's done in your household do you think you do? [40%-60%]

(7) Would you say that each of you has roughly the same amount of influence over major family decisions? [yes, with no reservations expressed]

(8) Do you and your spouse consider [the wife's] working outside the home as a temporary or permanent arrangement? [permanent, or as permanent as the husband's

It should be emphasized that these questions were not intended as my sole measures of equality in the family, only as screening devices to pick a sample which could then be subjected to closer scrutiny.

In the group of couples who were contacted and willing to be interviewed, nearly half turned out to not really practice role-sharing in their marriages, according to my rough preliminary measures. Among the remaining couples who were tentatively labelled as role-sharers, several types emerged, some of which I chose not to study. One type of role-sharing couple which was not retained for further study consisted of couples who hired outside help for housecleaning. Since being able to afford cleaning help is not a privilege available to all economic classes and since I was primarily interested in studying the factors which promise to increase role-sharing among couples on a widespread basis without creating a new domestic proletariat, I decided to drop those with housecleaning help. Another group of role-sharing couples not picked for study involved those who were not legally married. I expected that they might have unique arrangements that I was not prepared to study in detail. Several couples

were eliminated for miscellaneous reasons, such as living too far out of tow for convenient interviewing.

After eliminating couples on all these grounds, there were 31 remaining who qualified on the various criteria and were willing to participate in the study. The sample was fairly homogenous, despite efforts to recruit a variety of types of people for the study. For the most part, the people in the sample were engaged in or training themselves for jobs in professional fields, usually in social service or the humanities. In accordance with the types of occupations represented, educational levels in the sample also tended to be high: almost all of the sample were college graduates, with over 20% having doctorates, medical, or law degrees. The sample couples also tended to be young, with a majority of them being 26 to 30 years old. The mean number of years they had been married was six. Nearly half of the sample couples had children, most of which were not yet old enough to go to school.

Data Collection

Each of the 31 couples in the study was interviewed three times from January through June in 1976. Information on benefits and problems of role-sharing was obtained by individuals' response to general, open-ended questions (e.g., "Do you think sharing responsibilities has any benefits for marriage; if so, what are they?"), replies to more specific, close-ended questions (e.g., "Do you have any disagreements about doing housework? Yes/No") and through methods other than direct questions (e.g., amount of leisure time was computed with time-budget data). Usually, these interviews took place in the couples' homes and averaged 1 1/2 hours each. The interviews were tape-recorded so that the answers to open-ended questions could later be recorded more completely than note-taking during the interview would allow. Both husbands and wives were interviewed, jointly at certain stages and separately at other

stages. After the interviews, written forms were left for individuals to fill out and return by mail. These included a personality inventory, a time-budget and an attitudinal questionnaire.

During the study itself, I investigated in great depth the exact extent and ways in which couples shared the following family responsibilities: breadwinning, housekeeping, childcare, kinship obligations, handyman domestic chores (e.g., repairs). I also inquired into the family power structure by obtaining information on the process and outcome of recent and hypothetical decisionmaking activities. The great majority of the couples were found to be generally as egalitarian as the preliminary measures in the phone survey suggested. What departures from equality there were were spread out with no couples falling short on more than a small proportion of the numerous and fairly stringent standards for meeting the ideal type of role-sharing. Even those who failed to meet every last one of these standards showed themselves to be realizing and aspiring towards an ideal of family equality not found in or desired by the general population. (See Haas 1977 for the standards for role-sharing and how these couples measured up.)

BENEFITS OF ROLE-SHARING

Originally, I looked for the benefits of role-sharing as part of a larger search into the general consequences of role-sharing. However, it turned out that the benefits of role-sharing (at least the perceived benefits) also came up when the determinants of role-sharing were investigated. In fact, it appeared that couples came to adopt role-sharing not so much as a result of an ideological commitment to the value of sexual equality or exposure to unusual role models such as a working mother, but rather as a result of the pursuit of certain benefits which they perceived could not be realized in a traditional marriage.

Wives in particular seemed to realize that the traditional marriage pattern was incapable of realizing these benefits. Couples said they became pessimistic about traditional marriage yielding these benefits because of their experiences in a former marriage, of observation of their parents' traditional marriages or of having tried a traditional pattern in their own marriage in its early years.

In short, most of the benefits of role-sharing that are reported below were not pleasant surprises or fortunate by-products of this new style of marriage. Anticipated at the beginning of these couples' attempts at role-sharing, these benefits remain a major factor in the decision to continue role-sharing despite the problems that arise with it and despite the pressures to abandon it that arise from the relatively traditional context these couples must live in.

Benefits for the Individual

Findings from this study suggest that role-sharing has several benefits for the individual. Interestingly, individuals tended to report role-sharing as benefitting both partners of the marriage, instead of emphasizing only its positive effects on women. Moreover, wives were only slightly more likely to report role-sharing as having benefits for individuals than did husbands.

First, almost one-fourth of the 62 individuals in the sample suggested that role-sharing allowed each spouse the same opportunity to develop their abilities and pursue personal interests without being limited by traditional role expectations. Eight other individuals also mentioned that sharing the breadwinning role gave each the freedom to quit outside employment for a time and pursue other interests.

Next, other one-third of the sample reported that role-sharing meant that each spouse was less over-worked, less likely to worry about their family

responsibilities, and less likely to feel used or put upon. Over half of these people mentioned this as applying particularly to the woman, who traditionally was overburdened with housework. (Incidentally, no one mentioned that one consequence of role-sharing was an unpleasant increase in the husband's workload.)

Third, role-sharing seems to be associated with women having as much opportunity for leisure time pursuits as men. Analyzing the information on time spent at various leisure-time activities reported in time-budgets that couples kept as individuals for over a week, women were found to spend on the average 26.83 hours a week at leisure-time activities such as hobbies, TV, socializing, going out, organizational meetings, etc., while husbands spent 26.23 hours. In contrast, time budget studies of the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the general population show a substantial difference between the amount of hours employed women enjoy compared to employed men, with men having almost 6 1/2 more hours of free time a week than employed wives (Szalai 1972).

The fourth apparent benefit of role-sharing that was observed was a change in men and women's personalities in the direction of less sex-typing. That is, each sex seemed to expand their personality by acquiring certain traits traditionally reserved for the opposite sex, which allows the development and expression of capacities that would otherwise be suppressed. Individuals were asked after the second interview to fill out a questionnaire, reporting first on the personality characteristics they believed they had immediately before marriage and then on the personality characteristics they had at the time of the study. (These characteristics come from a list derived by Spence & Helmreich 1975, and include such characteristics as understanding, warmth, kindness, gentleness in the feminine scale and traits such as self-confidence, independence, aggressiveness on the masculine scale.) Eighty per cent of the men in the sample reported themselves as acquiring traditionally feminine characteristics during the course

of their marriage, while 90% of the women reported becoming more "masculine." Using the z-test to distinguish significant differences between correlated means, men's femininity scores before and after marriages were found to be significantly different at the .05 level of significance for a one-tailed test, as were women's masculine scores before and after marriage.

On the other hand, individuals' scores on the scale of personality traits traditionally associated with their own sex did not significantly change during marriage. This meant that while the women in the sample became more masculine in orientation after marriage, they did not lose many of the essentially positive feminine characteristics they had before marriage. Likewise, the men in the sample had acquired some positive feminine traits without losing the masculine traits they had before marriage.

Another benefit mentioned by one-fourth of the sample was that role-sharing meant that each spouse was not dependent on the other. Wives became independent of their husbands by earning their own incomes. Husbands were reported as gaining independence by having experience in doing domestic tasks, which enabled them to take care of their own personal needs and the needs of the house and family without depending on their wives to do so. Finally, in response to a question about what they liked about shared decisionmaking, about 20% of the sample mentioned that individuals didn't have to suffer being "bossed around" - that each individual's feelings were taken into account and respected when it came to family decisions.

Benefits for the Family

One of the major benefits for the family reported by the role-sharers in the study was an improvement in husband-wife relations. When asked to compare their marriages to more traditional marriages they knew, they thought their marriage was happier than traditional ones. Women were a little more likely to

reply in this manner than men. People supplied many reasons for why they thought their marriage was better. Even people who weren't sure their marriages were necessarily happier were able to mention a number of benefits role-sharing had for marriage.

Many individuals suggested that husband-wife relations improved through role-sharing because the spouses have more in common. As one wife explained:

> The main advantage is that we stay in the same world, we keep rolling in the same direction. When two people are living together and they're doing very different things with their lives - I guess the best example I can think of is the stereotyped one where the woman is staying home taking care of the child and the man is out in the world working - you're not in touch with the same things that are happening....I think it's really been one of the reasons that we have stayed together and I think that we're relatively satisfied....We're both doing basically the same kinds of things with our time....Our schedules are basically the same. We both get up in the morning and we go....We're both tired for the same reasons.

Another wife who was on a two-month maternity leave during part of the study contrasted their role-sharing arrangement with the temporary traditional arrangement they found themselves in by confiding:

> When [my husband] comes home now and we talk about our day... it's the highlight of my day if the meter man comes or what time the mail came. Very difficult to know what's going on and to be interesting.

Thirteen people reported that having so much in common caused spouses to appreciate and sympathize with each other more. They were less likely to nag at each other if a task went undone because they personally knew how hard it was to get around to doing an undesirable chore. They could also appreciate problems each had at work or school because they came up against the same things. As one wife stated:

> We can understand those frustrations that come out of the job. It would be much harder for me to relate to the problem he might be having with his supervisor if I didn't have a supervisor.

Twelve individuals reported that role-sharing gave them the opportunity to do things together more, and this increased interaction in turn enhanced husband-wife closeness. Some of the couples had opportunity and reason to interact because of their jobs or schoolwork. A few couples were in the same field, so they could profitably discuss their work together and occasionally carry out research or other projects together. Other couples, although in different fields, shared their work experiences by attending evening classes, meetings, or conferences together. (Of course, in any dual-career marriage a certain amount of this collaboration and sharing goes on, but in a role-sharing marriage it may come more easily because the husband's work isn't given priority and he isn't so wrapped up in his work or so fearful of competition that he can't take time out to do work-related things with his wife.) In role-sharing marriages, spouses also had occasion to be together while domestic chores were being performed. Some of the tasks were actually done by both at the same time; at other times, spouses would be physically near each other performing different domestic tasks. Since work hours of husbands and wives were approximately even and work schedules were often similar, couples also had occasion to spend a lot of their free time together.

Another benefit role-sharing had for husband-wife relations, according to 12 individuals, is that it called for a considerable amount of discussion, and this communicating in turn brought on greater intimacy between husband and wife. Several of the people mentioning this as a positive consequence reported it in connection with sharing decisionmaking. On the other hand, no one mentioned that the communication involved in negotiating domestic chores was beneficial for husband-wife relations. As will be reported later, communication on the latter topic often produced conflict, so it appears then that an increase in communication per se does not necessarily lead to

an increase in husband-wife intimacy.

Three people mentioned that role-sharing made the relationship more flexible, in that it was easier to make adjustments as conditions within or outside the family changed. Partners were not inhibited by roles which could stand in the way of their easily assuming new responsibilities or taking over the complete responsibility for one area of family life (e.g., bread-winning or childcare) in a crisis.

Finally, twelve individuals in the study reported that their marriage was happier or that role-sharing was beneficial for marriage because the individuals in the relationship received personal benefits from sharing (e.g., had more opportunity for self-fulfillment, were less over-worked, etc.) and happier individuals formed happier marriages.

Besides an improvement in husband-wife relations, a second major benefit of role-sharing cited for the family was improvement in parent-child relations. Five of the twelve women with children at home said that they felt they were better mothers because they worked outside the home and shared childcare with their husbands. They felt they were less bored, less hassled with managing two roles, not resentful about shouldering the entire burden of childcare. Three of the 24 parents mentioned that sharing childcare meant that the children got to know their father better than they would in a traditional family. Lastly, three parents reported that sharing childcare benefitted children by exposing them to more than just the mother's outlook on things.

An improvement in the family's financial situation was a third type of benefit of role-sharing that was suggested by people in the study. Most couples planned to have both partners working outside the home most of the time, and twelve individuals reported enjoying the financial comfort that two incomes can bring. Seven other people mentioned that a pattern of shared

breadwinning could benefit the family in a financial crisis. If one partner had trouble finding a good job or became too ill to work, the family could get along on the other spouse's income.

Finally, five individuals remarked that an egalitarian pattern of decision-making benefitted the family because it produced better decisions. They reasoned that having two people's input into decisions usually allowed a more thorough consideration of the merits of different alternatives. As one husband said:

> We probably make better decisions together than either one of us could make separately. If there's some good reason for not making a particular decision, probably one of us would think of it...while the other might overlook that.

PROBLEMS IN ROLE-SHARING

While their efforts to establish and maintain a marital arrangement characterized by role-sharing brought about certain positive benefits, couples in the study also encountered several problems. On the one hand, certain vestiges of traditional sex roles in the family made it hard for these couples to adapt perfectly to the role-sharing model. On the other hand, there were difficulties inherent in the role-sharing model itself, especially in its current American context, that couples had to learn to cope with.

Problems with Aspects of Traditional Sex-Roles

The couples in the study, for the most part, tended not to report any problems in achieving shared breadwinning and shared decisionmaking. The women in the group generally had entered marriage with a strong interest in gainful employment, so they did not have to be pushed into having a breadwinning role in the family. Gentle encouragement on the part of husbands,

however, was reported to have taken place to counter the pessimism and lack of confidence wives had when faced with competition in careers. A substantial minority of the women were still hesitant about completely accepting the notion that they were as obligated to work as their husbands, but the couples themselves did not see this attitude as an obstacle to the actual equal sharing of the responsibility of providing for the family's economic support.

As for shared decisionmaking, this was the area of role-sharing that most often had been instituted at the onset of marriage. People failed to report any problems here, perhaps because they had hit upon an egalitarian pattern of decisionmaking so early that they could not remember the difficulties involved. It could also be that the exercise of power within the family can be so subtly or unconsciously done that individuals are not always aware of problems in this regard.

Couples were, however, quite ready to report problems encountered in trying to establish an egalitarian division of domestic chores. These problems can be grouped into four types.

First, over one-third of the couples reported that a lack of skills on the part of one or the other of the spouses had impeded the realization of equality. For half of these couples it was the husband's lack of expertise in areas such as sewing or cooking which had caused problems, and in the other half of the cases it was the wife's inability to make repairs, handle the car, etc., which had inhibited an equal sharing of responsibility.

Couples often sought to cope with this type of problem by the knowledgeable spouse teaching the less knowledgeable one the new skill, or by the incapable spouse trying to develop the necessary ability on his/her own. But this solution often failed to work out. The people who lacked skills often lacked a desire to learn them that was great enough to help them endure the frustration and disappointment that accompanied the learning experience. Other

individuals claimed that they wanted to learn but had no time to devote to it - they were too busy with their careers or hesitated giving up valuable leisure time. Given time constraints, it was often regarded as more efficient to let the expert spouse do the task. Many tasks also came up only in a crisis situation (stopped-up drain, faulty car brakes, popped-off button) and many individuals felt that this was not a good time to learn. The expert could fix things up quicker so normality could resume. Finally, in cases such as wives' trying to learn car maintenance and home repairs, they had to interact with skeptical and hostile outsiders in the pursuit of these skills (e.g., hardware store personnel, garage mechanics). As a result, wives tended to shrink away from this type of contact and avoid learning the task.

In a few couples, there was some success in getting the one spouse to pick up a skill once possessed only by the other. Husbands learning how to mend was the situation most often recalled. In these few cases it seemed that learning was aided by the wife restraining herself from nagging the husband to learn, and by her giving him positive verbal reinforcement of a non-condescending type. Usually the husband expressed pride and satisfaction at having learned a skill which increased his self-sufficiency.

A second, even more common type of problem couples had in sharing domestic chores was that one or both spouses lacked the inclination to do some non-traditional tasks for which they had skills or which required no special skill. This situation was reported by over half of the couples, with husbands reported as the culprits more often than wives. About one-third of the couples with this problem mentioned that it was hard to break with the traditional pattern they had observed in their parents' households. Over one-third claimed that it often seemed more efficient to let the traditional spouse perform the chore in the face of the other partner's inexperience, busy schedule, or laziness.

Couples had different solutions for this problem. Most often, the spouse who felt over-worked (usually the wife) complained and threatened to stop doing that particular chore or some other task until the lazy spouse resolved to do better. Sometimes a temporary system of rotation was agreed upon to get the recalcitrant into the right habit. Occasionally the lazy spouse would develop more of a liking or tolerance for the chore or become so experienced at it that the problem would be solved. Sometimes a couple ended up agreeing to some specialization in order to avoid further conflict, especially if each spouse wanted to avoid certain non-traditional chores that the other spouse did not mind doing.

A third problem, mentioned by one-half of the couples, was the wife's reluctance to give up her traditional authority over many domestic chores. For all but one of these couples, this had been a problem in the past that had been overcome by the time of the study. Many women had entered their marriages expecting to juggle two roles - homemaker and worker. One-third of the women reported that they expected to do all the traditionally female domestic chores when they got married because their mothers had done them and they had learned it was the woman's duty to do those chores. Some of the women in the sample mentioned that they had actually liked the challenge of trying to simultaneously be a great housewife-mother and a successful professional. Many had liked doing the chores themselves and most of them had believed they had more competence in doing them than their husbands.

The change to a more even sharing of domestic chores was not easy. Not only did they have to contend with the husband's lack of skills and disinclination to do chores, they had to cope with guilt feelings about abandoning their traditional role and with the mixed feelings they had seeing their husbands do non-traditional tasks. By the time of the study, however, all but one of the

women reported that it no longer bothered them in the slightest that their husbands performed tasks traditionally assigned to women. Furthermore, only two of the women reported themselves or were reported by their husbands to feel slightly guilty about leaving their children in the care of others while they worked. Their strong interest in a profession seemed to have consumed more and more of their mental and physical energy and housework seemed increasingly tedious rather than challenging. In addition, the women's movement made them realize that doing double work is unfair and made them feel better and better about their choice to share domestic chores with their husbands.

The fourth type of problem couples frequently mentioned in connection with overcoming the traditional chore pattern involved the standards husbands and wives had for housekeeping. Over half of the couples reported that at one time in their marriage wives had generally advocated a higher standard of orderliness and cleanliness in the household than had their husbands. This did not produce any conflict as long as the woman was in charge of getting the chores done. But as soon as a decision to share the responsibility for chores was reached, it caused big problems. Wives pushed for chores to be done as often as they wanted to see them done and to be performed in the exact manner they thought they should be performed. They fretted about the condition of the house all the time and experienced embarrassment on this point if someone dropped in unexpectedly. Husbands, on the other hand, wanted to do the chores according to their own ideas regarding how often they needed to be done and in the manner (often unconventional) that appealed most to them. Husbands consistently felt wives were too finicky and wives regarded husbands as too sloppy. Most of the couples in the sample had coped with this discrepancy in standards through both spouses changing their expectations - wives lowering their standards and husbands raising theirs. This change was usually precipitated by

wives being busy with their jobs or schoolwork, and it was accompanied by hours of heated discussions and practical experiments. Both spouses generally professed to be happier with the new standard; wives in particular laughed about the old stringent rules they had set regarding home care. However, wives in the study tended to still be slightly more dissatisfed with the family's housekeeping standard than their husbands were and more likely to spontaneously mention that they would like hiring outside help, presumably because the standard of housekeeping in their estimate was not yet high enough.

One of the most surprising findings in the study was that wives appeared to be the ones who most often instigated role-sharing, yet they more often failed to equally share traditionally male family responsibilities than husbands failed to share traditionally feminine responsibilities. Wives were often hesitant about committing themselves to a lifetime of breadwinning on a level of obligation equal to their husbands', they were found to sometimes neglect to participate on an equal level in the making of major decisions in areas traditionally dominated by husbands, and time-budget data revealed they did not spend as much time on the average at masculine domestic chores as men did. Men, on the other hand, were uniformly positive about their wives' uninterrupted employment, had learned to share in the making of minor family decisions, and spent on the average as much time at feminine domestic chores as women did. Women were also the ones who occasionally made difficult their husbands' sharing of women's traditional responsibilities by insisting on a high standard of housekeeping and feeling a little jealous about the husbands' ability to manage the household and children on their own.

Why do wives have more difficulty role-sharing than husbands? The answer might lie in the different amounts of self-confidence that husbands and wives traditionally possess. Confident people are not hesitant to tackle new responsibilities, to learn to adapt to new environments, to participate in the making of major decisions, and to relinguish hold on those responsibilities

that have formerly been a source of self-esteem. They feel sure that they can successfully accomplish whatever they set their minds to do. Men usually possess high levels of self-confidence, which they acquire through sex-role socialization and through awareness of the relatively high status they have had both within and outside the family. This might explain why they are not hesitant about becoming accustomed to doing new (traditionally feminine) chores, about sharing responsibility for breadwinning with their wives. etc. Wives, on the other hand, trypically lack self-confidence, and this may explain why they have trouble fully sharing traditionally male duties.

Another possible explanation for wives' sharing roles less easily concerns the skills required for the successful performance of a shared role pattern. The men in this group seemed to have had somewhat more opportunity to acquire the skills necessary for their sharing of the wife's traditional role than the wives had for picking up "masculine" skills. From living alone, being in communes, or working in certain jobs, men had learned about housekeeping. Most had also been assigned "feminine" chores in childhood. The women, too, had lived on their own and picked up some "masculine" skills, but traditionally masculine tasks don't come up very often; when they do, they can often be taken care of by paying people like repairers and mechanics to do them.

Difficulties Inherent in the Role-Sharing Model

Even when couples were successful in overcoming the aspects of traditional sex-roles described above which interfered with role-sharing, they still had to contend with some problems seemingly inherent in the role-sharing model itself, particularly in its present social context.

One serious problem was the ncessity to resolve conflicts between the spouses' jobs or studies. In response to a question about competing job offers, all but four couples reported that at least once in the past they had had to

deal with a situation in which a spouse had a job offer or wanted to look for a graduate school or job in another city, while their mate was already in a job or school they were reluctant to leave. In a majority of such cases, the conflict was resolved by one spouse (usually the wife) giving up their job or changing schools so the other could take the new position or attend the school of his/her choice. The wife usually ended up giving in because her career or interest in one tended to be less developed than her husband's at the time, especially since the husband was typically older. Moreover, in the past the couples had not been as committed to the principle of job equality as they were at the time of the study. Other less common solutions to job conflicts included the spouse who desired to relocate giving up the idea, spouses compromising on what city to live in so that each had career opportunities, and spouses setting up separate residences and commuting to be with each other at definite intervals.

All but three of the couples felt that conflicts between jobs could also be a problem in the future. Most couples had settled on one or more strategies for dealing with this situation. One of the strategies most of them planned to employ was to give priority to one person's job. Husbands' jobs were not any more likely to be given priority in the total sample than were wives'; generally, couples planned to give the spouse who had the less marketable skills or the poorer job opportunities their choice when a conflict arose. The next most common plan for job conflicts was separation - that is, spouses accepting jobs and living in different cities and visiting each other regularly. In all, 17 of the 31 couples mentioned this as a possibility. For the most part, couples did not like the idea of separating but were willing to entertain the notion as a way to maintain a dual-career marriage. Another solution mentioned by some couples was for husband and wife to take turns holding the

job of their choice. Finally, a few couples mentioned that one spouse's job offer in another city would give the other an opportunity to do free-lance work, engage in independent research, or set themselves up in business.

Several couples hoped to avoid making a decision about job priority by only looking for jobs at the same time in the same geographic area. This solution is only available to couples in which the husband and wife are at comparable stages in their careers, which is not common, especially since husbands tend to be older than wives. This also becomes more difficult for couples to do as the professional job market tightens.

Another common problem individuals in the sample had was conflict between their job and family responsibilities. This was reported by over half of the total sample, by husbands a little more often than by wives. Most of those individuals reporting job-family conflicts mentioned that their jobs interfered with familiy responsibilities, rather than vice-versa. Many complained that housework didn't get done, that they lacked energy and patience to interact well with their children, and that they did not have enough leisure time to spend with their families. About one-third of those reporting conflicts mentioned that family duties interfered with their job performance: they had to cut down on over-time work, had trouble doing job-related work at home, had to rearrange their schedules when children became ill, had little time to attend job-related meetings in the evenings and on weekends. Such job-family conflicts will persist as long as employers fail to recognize that jobholders also can have family obligations and interests and neglect to restructure occupations accordingly. The couples' strategies for dealing with this problem usually involved adjusting housework. The most common strategy, employed by over one-third of the couples, was to cut down on housework or at least to give it a very low priority - after job or school responsibilities

and after spending free time with family members. Next most common was for couples to maintain a regular schedule of housekeeping so it never got out of hand. Several couples mentioned that almost daily they engaged in negotiation and discussion regarding who would assume responsibility for the various family chores that would come up that day. By careful planning they were able to save considerable time at the same time as they assured that chores got done. The two couples with the oldest children had encouraged their offspring to take care of themselves to a great extent (e.g., wash their own clothes) and to assume regular responsibility for some household chores. This relieved the parents of a considerable amount of work and was thought to teach children independence and the virtues of sharing domestic chores.

Several couples mentioned that they tried to cut down on their jobs' interference with family life by segregating the two as much as possible. They tried not to bring work home and tried to reserve weekends for family activities. Finally, a few individuals mentioned that career activities themselves were curtailed. One wife reported:

> When two people in two careers work, one person does not have the option of staying at meetings until 7 o'clock at night or not coming home from a research lab, or going to meetings and staying out of town for four extra days. These options are not open to you with two careers going....I think we make decisions not to do those things that might enhance one's career.

It was not clear whether role-sharing put these individuals at a real career disadvantage, although some observers have suggested that it would (Hunt & Hunt 1977). Many of the role-sharers in the study were noticeably very productive in their fields, so perhaps a role-sharing lifestyle contains some compensations that allow an individual to do well at a career (e.g., interaction with spouse on professional matters, more efficient time-use).

Another common problem associated with role-sharing among these couples

was interpersonal conflict. One or both spouses in 1/3 of the couples mentioned that trying to share domestic chores had caused disagreements, though the actual intensity and frequency of conflict was reported to be low. Points of contention included how chores were done, whose duty or whose turn it was to do a chore, and who had the most time to do a chore. While disagreements about chores are undoubtedly related to inevitable difference in personal preferences, to some extent they are influenced by different socialization experiences which are amenable to change. Only two couples mentioned that an egalitarian decisionmaking pattern caused disagreements, and none mentioned that any arguments occurred concerning sharing breadwinning.

The final problem individuals mentioned in connection with role-sharing was dissatisfaction with housekeeping standards. Over half of the individuals in the study expressed discontent with the level of orderliness and cleanliness of their homes. Since both the husband and wife were busy with jobs or schoolwork and since housework was often consciously given lower priority by these couples, it is not surprising that individuals felt anxious about their housekeeping standard. On the other hand, there was actually little evidence that their homes were in fact being neglected. The actual number of hours spent at traditional housekeeping tasks was still rather high (around 20 hours a week per couple) and informal inspection of the homes by interviewers revealed that the couples generally kept their residences very neat and clean. Still, these families were spending substantially less time performing domestic chores than were couples reported on in previous studies. One study puts the number of hours a week spent on housework at 31 for couples where the wife was employed and 49 for couples where the wife was not employed outside the home (Robinson & Converse, cited in Babcock 1975). Another study produced even higher figures: 43 hours of housework per week for couples where the wife worked and 68 hours

for couples where the wife didn't work (Walker 1970). Either the role-sharing couples were correct in their belief that they had a low housekeeping standard (in ways not apparent to a casual visitor), or they skip a lot of unnecessary housework or perform it in a more efficient fashion than do traditional families. Part of the problem may be due to these couples having internalized the unusually (and some say ridiculously) high standards of housekeeping that have developed in the U.S. since World War II with the rise of the cult of domesticity designed to keep women at home, busily applying various procedures to keep their abodes free of yellow waxy buildup, spots on glasses, dull tabletop finishes, house odors, etc.

After finding out about all the problems and pitfalls role-sharers had encountered, I was led to the conclusion that role-sharing is a lifestyle that demands the wholehearted willingness of <u>both</u> spouses. Role-sharing demands that both partners take into account each other's job and leisure activities when planning things that impinge on each other. By definition, role-sharing means that both spouses share <u>responsibility</u> for breadwinning, decisionmaking, and domestic chores, and the sharing of these responsibilities requires forethought and close attention to family needs. For these couples, this kind of commitment to role-sharing seemed to derive from the expectation that the arrangement would produce great benefits for both spouses which would outweigh the costs of implementing a new style of marriage and in the face of serious obstacles like the spouses' lack of cross-sex-role skills, the presence of small children in the household, skeptical outsiders, and demanding jobs (63% worked over 40 hours a week, 82% had to bring work home, 1/3 had to travel out of town overnight on a regular basis).

FACTORS FACILITATING ROLE-SHARING

Generally speaking, these 31 couples were interested in and able to adopt role-sharing because they lacked certain problems. As a group, they did not have to deal with certain obstacles that most couples would probably face if they were to attempt role-sharing.

For one thing, the parents of the couples in the study were reported to be approving or at least neutral toward their offspring's experiments with role-sharing. Though half the sample said they really didn't care what their parents thought about their style of marriage, role-sharing is probably easier to adopt and keep up when people don't have to constantly defend or hide it from critical parents. The parents of these couples were not especially radical on the issue of sexual equality in general, but they had been somewhat unconventional in terms of the sex-role norms of their time: the father helped a little around the house, the father was less than totally authoritarian, the mother worked a few years to support the family, etc. As a result, their children did not have to break with a family tradition of a strict division of labor along sex lines, in order to institute role-sharing.

The couples also revealed that their parents' tolerance of their role-sharing was based to a large extent on a false impression of what it really involved or how long the couples planned to practice it. Many reported that their parents mistakenly regarded their arrangement as one where each spouse "helped" the other to perform those duties which remained primarily in the hands of the spouse traditionally responsible for them. A few others regarded it as a fad or a stage their offspring were going through that would disappear once they settled down, abandoned their idealism, or had children. Finally, some parents seemed to have remained neutral by glossing over what their children were doing and pretending that they were still engaged in tradi-

tional marital roles.

As mobile professionals or graduate students, the vast majority of the couples did not live near their more conventional parents, siblings, and hometown neighbors. The couples also had few traditional friends and were uninvolved in churches where the old-fashioned views of men's and women's duties are still enshrined in official teachings. They had received unusually high levels of education, which tends to make individuals skeptical of traditional patterns and more aware of the power of arbitrary social norms. Finally, the role-sharers had come of age in the late 1960's, when the political climate, especially around university campuses, encouraged the questioning of tradition. Detachment from sources of traditional norms, therefore, seemed to facilitate role-sharing.

The role-sharing couples in the study also seemed to be unusually lucky in landing jobs that permitted some flexibility in terms of being able to set schedules and being able to work at home. For example one male journalism professor noted:

> I called in this morning, told myssecretary I'd be a little late, just got the kids off to school and I had to straighten up a little, wash a few dishes.

The town they lived in (Madison, Wisconsin) also had an unusually plentiful supply of daycare centers and babysitters, which permitted these couples to have small children while their parents remained employed, even at 9-5 jobs.

Finally, the role-sharers in the study had developed radical attitudes about certain things that probably permitted them to adopt role-sharing with a minimum of cognitive dissonance. For example, they didn't believe it to be important for a child's development that its mother stay at home in its first years; in fact, they tended to think it harmful to the child and

parent-child interaction if the mother monopolized childcare. The role-sharers also had relatively non-sex-typed aptitudes and interests; for example, husbands had only lukewarm interest in career goals and had had prior experience with domestic tasks, while the wives were strongly committed to employment and were not that interested in homemaking. The liberal university community they lived in condoned nonconformity to a great extent, enabling these couples to feel comfortable about their unorthodoxy and to find friends whose views and practices were compatible with their own.

CONCLUSION

An exploratory study of role-sharing couples revealed that an egalitarian marriage style can be worked out which is capable of fitting new circumstances outside the family and simultaneously meeting the needs of family members. Role-sharing appears to enhance self-actualization and better family relations, at least for certain couples. At the same time, the investigation revealed that there exist considerable social barriers to the widespread abandonment of traditional family roles. For instance, vestiges of sex-role socialization make it difficult for couples to equitably share responsibility for all domestic chores, inflexible work hours would make sharing childcare difficult, and traditional attitudes about children's needs would stand in the way of fathers participating more in childrearing.

It would be easy to be completely pessimistic about the prospects for a widespread conversion to role-sharing because of the inhibiting factors in the social context. Still, the role-sharing couples who already have appeared (e.g., those in this study) probably play a considerable role in creating a climate more conducive to role-sharing. A movement such as this needs its

pioneers to show others that a new lifestyle is workable and that it yields certain benefits that the old traditional pattern does not, especially in light of social changes occurring outside the family. The role-sharers already have been successful at winning converts to their cause: individuals in the study often mentioned that parents, friends, and younger siblings were following their example. Furthermore, as middle-class professionals, individuals such as the role-sharers in this study are often in a position to push for change in institutions or attitudes on the official level. As their numbers grow, we might expect some institutional and attitudinal barriers to disintegrate because of their ability to put pressure in the right places.

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